

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0340

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 1748

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID XJ

SUBJ: STATE/AID SOUTHERN AFRICAN WORKING GROUP: AID SOUTHERN
AFRICA TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM PLANNING STUDY

REF: (A) 76 STATE 27153, (B) PRETORIA 0062, (C) GABORONE 2400

1. EMBASSY AGREES THAT ECONOMIC JUSTIFICATION FOR BOTSWANA-NAMIBIA ROAD IS SLIGHT AT PRESENT TIME. HOWEVER, SUCH A PROJECT MIGHT BE JUSTIFIED IN NEXT FEW YEARS SHOULD DECISION BE TAKEN TO CONSTRUCT AN EAST-WEST RAILWAY LINKING FRANCISTOWN TO WALVIS BAY. IN THAT EVENT, WE PRESUME AT LEAST A SERVICE ROAD WOULD BE NECESSARY TO SUPPORT THE PARALLEL LAYING AND SERVICING OF RAILROAD TRACK OVER THE KALAHARI DESERT.

2. ALTHOUGH CONSIDERATION OF AN EAST-WEST RAILWAY HAS NOT GONE FAR IN THE GOB, SOME OFFICIALS SEE IT AS THE BEST IF NOT THE ONLY MEANS OF TRANSPORTING OUT THE VAST KNOWN WEALTH OF KALAHARI COAL AND SODA ASH. PROBABLY, MORE CRUCIAL TO THE DECISION TO BUILD A RAILWAY WOULD BE THE DISCOVERY OF SIGNIFICANT DEPOSITS OF COPPER, COPPER/NICKEL, LEAD, ZINC, SILVER, MANGANESE AND URANIUM WHICH COULD WELL BE IN THE REGION. TOWARD THE END OF PROVING THE KALAHARI'S MINERAL POTENTIAL, PROPONANTS OF A POSSIBLE RAILWAY ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO THE RESULTS OF A CANADIAN (CIDA) AEROMAGNETIC STUDY OF THE KALAHARI TO BE RELEASED
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IN JUNE 1978 AND TO THE RESULTS OF RESOURCE PROBABILITY STUDIES WHICH MIGHT FOLLOW THE CANADIAN EFFORT.

3. ALTHOUGH A BOTSWANA-NAMIBIA ROAD WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE SOME BENEFICIAL EFFECT IN SPREADING SETTLEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT WESTWARD FROM THE OVERLY CONCENTRATED EASTERN EDGE OF THE COUNTRY, WE BELIEVE THAT THE POINT OF ECONOMIC JUSTIFICATION

WOULD ARISE FOR NOW ONLY WITH THE DECISION TO BUILD A RAILWAY
-- AND THAT ENORMOUS DECISION CAN BE TAKEN ONLY AFTER THE GOB,
INVESTORS AND DONORS HAVE A CLEARER IDEA OF BOTSWANA'S MINERAL
POTENTIAL.
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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